

## WHAT'S COOKING IN OCEANSIDE?

### DINING: Foodie Scene Expands In Affordable, Welcoming Town

■ By MARIEL CONCEPCION

A hospitality renaissance of sorts kicked off in Oceanside with the

opening of places like **Harney Sushi**, **333 Pacific** and **Flying Pig Pub & Kitchen** starting around 2011.

"Those three operations were the catalysts for the shift," said **Gumaro Escarcega**, program manager at **Main Street Oceanside**, a nonprofit business group. The eateries were followed by oth-

ers like **Swami's Café**, **Petite Madeleine Bakery**, **Local Tap House**, **Masters Oceanside**, **Wrench and Rodent Seabastropub** and **Bagby Beer Co.**

And the renaissance continues today at full speed. Drawn to roots in the area, the beach culture and the relatively inexpensive prices compared

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Photo by Jamie Scott Lytle

**Exhale**, a restaurant offering wood-fired cuisine, opened in January. It's part of an ongoing food and beverage renaissance of sorts in Oceanside, welcoming a host of new restaurants and tasting rooms, boutique hotels and activities.

## Growth Brings Kyriba To a San Diego HQ

**TECH:** Fintech Leaves NYC, Sees Good Hiring Climate in S.D.

■ By ELISE REUTER

**Kyriba**, a fast-growing software company that helps finance executives manage their companies' assets, is scouting out new headquarters in the UTC area. The company announced in February that it would shift its HQ from New York City's financial district back to San Diego, where it has a 120-person office just off of Towne Center Drive.

Just a year ago, Kyriba had 50 employees in the same offices. The rows of desks have gotten closer together as the company has boosted its

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## Casino Renovations Are Game Changers

**GAMING:** Sector Moves Its Focus to Resort-Style Amenities

■ By MARIEL CONCEPCION

In the last few years, casinos in and around San Diego County have collectively invested north of \$1 billion to revamp and/or expand their properties. According to tribal representatives and experts in the gaming industry, this is all in an effort to evolve from mono-dimensional gaming facilities to multi-dimensional, full-service resort models in order to better serve already-established guests and potentially gain new ones.

This year alone, the **Jamul Indian Village's Jamul**

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## AbacusNext CEO Pursues Professional Services Sectors

■ By ELISE REUTER

Though **AbacusNext** has been around since 1983, the San Diego-based software company has seen startup-like growth in the last five years. When CEO

**Alessandra Lezama** joined the family-owned company in 2013, **AbacusNext** was a \$5 million company with 29 employees building case management software for legal clients.

Now, **AbacusNext** has just under 500 employees globally, reporting \$77.89 million in revenue in 2017. Private equity firm **Providence Equity Partners**

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Alessandra Lezama, CEO of AbacusNext



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## Cooking Skills, Consulting Prowess Serve His Customers

As a child growing up in Montreal, Canada, chef and restaurateur **Ken Irvine** aspired to be a tuna fisherman.

His dad was the president of **Zapata Ocean Resources Inc.** and then went on to start his own tuna fishing company, which eventually brought the family to Coronado in the late '70s. After graduating **Coronado High School** in the early 1980s, Irvine decided to try his hand at the family business, which led him to Panama, Pago Pago in American Samoa and a handful of other places in the western and southwestern Pacific.

Several years later, when the industry seemed to be declining and at the recommendation of a former girlfriend who noticed his knack for cooking, Irvine turned in his fishing pole for an apron and moved to New York to attend the **Culinary Institute of America**. It was only a short time after he graduated that he worked for a Michelin Star restaurant, **Le Relais a Moujins**, in France, and was hired as a sous chef and then promoted to executive chef of the **Plaza on Hyde Park Hotel** in London. As a result of the latter, he earned the recognition of being the youngest executive chef of a major hotel in the city at the age of 26.

### Irvine Hospitality

Today, Irvine, 57, wears more than just a chef's hat. He owns **Irvine Hospitality Group**, which provides consulting services to hospitality ventures including hotels, fine dining, nightlife and the retail industry; he is the chef and owner of **Bleu Bohème**, a French restaurant located in Kensington; and he is part-owner of **Sea180°** in Imperial Beach with **David Cohn** of the **Cohn Restaurant Group**. He has about 25 employees between Bleu and Irvine. While Irvine wouldn't share revenue figures, marketing tech firm **Zoom Information Inc.** reports Bleu Bohème makes annual revenue of about \$5.6 million. Irvine said he projects both his restaurants will grow at a 3 percent to 5 percent rate this year.

### Early Hardships

The path to success wasn't exactly easy for Irvine. For example, when he decided to go into the food industry and study in New York, he needed experience in order to qualify for the program. So, he worked the morning shift at a café in Mission Valley and then the 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. shift at the former China Camp at Fat City. He did that five to six days a week for six months before he got accepted to the culinary school. And when he moved to London, he was faced with issues with his visa which resulted in him bouncing around from city to city, restaurant to restaurant, sometimes sleeping in the busmen room for days at a time,



Photo courtesy of Ken Irvine  
Chef and restaurateur Ken Irvine owns Irvine Hospitality Group, which provides consulting services to hospitality ventures. He is the chef and owner of Bleu Bohème, a French restaurant located in Kensington and he is part-owner of Sea180° in Imperial Beach with David Cohn from Cohn Restaurant Group.



before being forced to return to the states.

### First Restaurant

By then, he had wiped out all of the money he'd made and returned to fishing in South America to make more, said Irvine. When he returned, Irvine, then 29, purchased his first restaurant, **Chez Loma**, located in his hometown of Coronado in 1991. A few years later, he opened up **Chameleon Club** and **Lizard Lounge** right across the street with some partners.

His ownership in Chameleon/Lizard was short-lived, as disputes among the owners led him to sell his shares back to the partners less than a year later. He went on to own Loma for about 14 years before selling that property as well. By then, he had switched gears again, and had started to put more of his focus on his consulting business.

### Consulting Work

Irvine Hospitality Group officially

launched in 1997 and through the one-man team, Irvine helps other businesses in the hospitality industry. One of his clients was the \$500 million **Terranea Resort** in Rancho Palos Verdes. Irvine worked on that project for two years, handling the creation of the food service and design of the lobby and the rooms, among other aspects. Other projects include **Hotel Majestic** in San Francisco, for which he developed two back-to-back restaurants, and **The Sofia Hotel** in San Diego.

Irvine also helped David Cohn develop six of his San Diego-based restaurant concepts.

"What I really enjoy and what is my forte is when a client comes to me and says he wants to develop or own a restaurant," said Irvine. "They may or may not have an idea, or maybe they have some kind of idea," and Irvine helps them grow and expand on that. He adds that on a few occasions he turns projects down

because, through his experience in the industry, he can sometimes predict when a restaurant may have little chance of survival in the San Diego market.

### Bleu Bohème

In 2009, Irvine purchased Bleu Bohème and in 2013, he and Cohn teamed up for Sea. For Bleu, he oversees all front and back-of-house operations and for Sea, he developed the Polynesian-inspired food menu. Bleu has gone on to receive many accolades during its time, including Best French Restaurant by the **California Restaurant Association** from 2011 to 2013 and then again in 2016 and 2018.

Irvine said he wouldn't change a thing about his path. Today, he would consider opening up maybe one more restaurant, but, "life is not too bad right now," he said. When he isn't working with his handful of clients on the consulting side, Irvine is golfing or surfing or spending time with his twin boys.

## Map to State's Culinary Stars Will Be in Michelin Guide

**Michelin** and **Visit California** have teamed up for a one-of-a-kind Michelin Guide expansion: the Michelin Guide California 2019. According to a news release, the new Michelin guide, the first to cover an entire state, will include restaurants in San Diego, as well as Los

Angeles, Orange County and Santa Barbara.

The project will pay homage to California's growth in the culinary sector, said Visit California President and CEO **Caroline Beteta** via a statement. "California and Michelin are a perfect

pairing, joining forces to show the world the innovation and breadth of the Golden State's culinary landscape."

"With access to many of the world's best farms, food producers and vineyards, California cuisine is respected worldwide not only for the quality of

its ingredients but also due to the creativity displayed by its chefs," **Gwendal Poullennec**, international director for the **Michelin Guides**, said in the news release.

Michelin will reveal the 2019 selections in the inaugural California Guide during an event this summer.